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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 1766  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 000515

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [BG](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: CHINESE FOREIGN MINISTER OFFERS NUCLEAR  
COOPERATION AND OTHER GOODIES TO FRIENDLY BANGLADESH

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Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty. Reason: 1.4 (b) and (d)

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SUMMARY  
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1. (C) The Chinese Foreign Minister offered Bangladesh nuclear power cooperation and a new exhibition center during a brief visit in April that strengthened already friendly bilateral relations. The largesse was a sign of appreciation for Bangladesh's unstinting support for China on its hot-button issues: Tibet, Taiwan and the Summer Olympics. Shortly after the visit, Bangladesh's Foreign Affairs Adviser in a statement stressed the importance of aligning foreign policy to a "new Asian era." An invitation to the Chief Adviser to visit China offered an opportunity for the two countries to further cement the relationship, but one Bangladeshi foreign-policy expert said he expected no negative fallout for U.S.-Bangladesh ties.

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FOREIGN MINISTER BRINGS AN ARMFUL OF PRESENTS  
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2. (SBU) Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi received a red-carpet welcome during his April 24-25 visit to Dhaka, meeting Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed and Chief of Army Staff General Moeen Uddin Ahmed among several Bangladeshi officials. He came bearing a number of gifts, including an offer to build an exhibition center in Dhaka and a 60 million renmenbi (8.6 million U.S. dollar) grant. The two countries also signed a nuclear cooperation agreement that the Foreign Affairs Adviser indicated could include participation in the Rooppur Nuclear power plant project, which has long been on the drawing board. Chinese Embassy officials told PolOff after the visit that while China would view the project with a "good attitude" it had yet to determine the scope of nuclear cooperation. They also said China's nuclear cooperation agreement with Pakistan would be a model for cooperation with Bangladesh. (Comment: China and Pakistan signed a comprehensive agreement on the peaceful use of nuclear power in 1986; a subsequent 1991 nuclear cooperation agreement included the supply of a 300-megawatt power reactor. There have been many allegations since that Chinese technology boosted Pakistan's nuclear weapons program. End Comment.)

3. (SBU) Foreign Minister Yang extended invitations to the Chief Adviser and the Foreign Affairs Adviser to visit China

as soon as practicable. Farooq Sobhan, a former Bangladesh ambassador to China who closely follows bilateral relations, said the invitations effectively allowed Bangladesh to "jump the queue" of the many national leaders who wanted to visit China. He said the invitations were an important nod to Dhaka that underscored the importance Beijing placed on the bilateral relationship.

¶4. (SBU) Sobhan said the largesse indicated Beijing's desire to upgrade relations with Bangladesh in light of its unequivocal support for China on Tibet, Taiwan and the Beijing Olympics. He said Beijing was rallying around its friends at a time when international calls to boycott the Summer Olympics to protest China's Tibet policy were on the rise. Indeed, in a conversation with PolOff after the Yang visit, the head of the Political Section in the Chinese Embassy, Mu Yongpeng, described Bangladesh as a "very good" and "trusted" friend that had always supported China. (Comment: The attention bestowed on Bangladesh also reminds developing countries of the potential benefits for strongly supporting China on its litmus-test issues, particularly in the run-up to the Olympics. End Comment.)

¶5. (SBU) Yang's visit also highlighted the strong military and economic component of the bilateral relationship. In his meeting with Moeen, Yang stressed the importance of military cooperation. (Comment: Bangladesh has purchased 16 Chinese-made fighter aircraft in recent years, and the two countries have a modest ongoing training exchange program. End Comment.) On the economic side, China was expected to be a major player in the latest round of bids for offshore gas exploration rights, which opened May 7.

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THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS ADVISER LOOKS EAST ...  
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¶6. (C) Two days after Yang's trip, the Foreign Affairs Adviser made a strongly worded statement hailing the start of a "new Asian era" in which "our policies need to be realigned to these global changes." He identified China, Japan, South Korea, the countries of Southeast Asia, India and the Gulf states as the new Eastern powers. According to local media reports, he emphasized the need to break out of the "trap of donor-recipient relationships" and claimed Bangladesh paid much more in duties to the developed world than it received in aid. Sobhan said the statement did not reflect any new policy direction but instead emphasized Bangladesh's continued desire to increase ties with its fast-developing Asian neighbors. He noted that many other Asian countries, including Thailand, Malaysia and China, also advocated closer ties within the region. "For a country like Bangladesh, we want to be part of this whole process," he said.

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CONCLUSION: ... BUT THE WEST STILL MATTERS  
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¶7. (C) Despite the genuinely warm reception Foreign Minister Yang received, there remain areas of potential bilateral tension between China and Bangladesh. As one example, two-way trade of about \$3 billion a year is overwhelmingly in China's favor. China also remains a strong competitor in the global market for ready-made garments, which is Bangladesh's leading export. For all of the talk of looking East, it is still the developed West that continues to wield the most political influence in Bangladesh, as manifest in domestic obsession over U.S. and British attitudes toward the current Caretaker Government and its reform policies. Indeed, the Foreign Affairs Adviser's remarks likely reflect frustration with the influence that traditional Western donors continue to exercise here.  
Moriarty